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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3444  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC//NSC// PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003146

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/19/2017  
TAGS: [PREF](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: RRT ERBIL: CODEL BAUCUS MEETING WITH KRG PRESIDENT  
MASSOUD BARZANI

Classified By: Classified By Regional Coordinator Jess Baily for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

This is a Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT) Cable.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The President of the Kurdistan Region Massoud Barzani told a Congressional delegation that he supported a federal Iraq. He did not believe national reconciliation was possible if Sunni and Shiia Islamic extremists remained in control and favored the idea of a U.S. residual troop level of 50,000 in Iraq. Barzani expressed disappointment that neither General Petraeus nor Ambassador Crocker mentioned the contribution of the Kurdistan Region in the war on terror in their testimony before Congress during the week of September 10. END SUMMARY

#### OPENING REMARKS

¶2. (SBU) On September 16, Senators Max Baucus (D-MT), Olympia Snowe (R-ME), Ken Salazar (D-CO), Ben Nelson (D-NE) and RRT Offs met with Massoud Barzani, the President of the Kurdistan Region, at his office in Sallahaddin, Iraqi Kurdistan. The discussion opened with President Barzani expressing his appreciation for the visit. Sen. Baucus thanked the President and underscored the importance of Barzani's advice on key issues related to national reconciliation as Congress considers various proposals regarding Iraq.

¶3. (C) President Barzani said he was grateful for the sacrifices the U.S. has made to overthrow the Ba'th regime. After the liberation, he continued, the U.S. made some mistakes that led to a vacuum that was filled by terrorists and sectarian violence. The sectarian violence is an Iraqi problem but the war on terror is international in scope and "must be led by the U.S."

¶4. (C) The Iraq of the past is an artificial state created by the British, President Barzani said. Today we believe in a federal Iraq in which each region is protected by constitutional rights. The Kurds support the Iraqi Constitution, he continued, and uphold the provision for national oil revenue sharing by population.

#### ON NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

¶5. (C) Senator Snowe asked Barzani if national reconciliation was possible under Prime Minister Maliki. President Barzani expressed doubts about reconciliation because, he said, the problem was an ineffectual mix of moderates and extremists in the Government of Iraq (GOI). He stressed that the Sunni and the Shia want to fight and carry out "sectarian cleansing." This problem reflects a cultural tradition of vengeance and retaliation rather than the choice of Mr. Maliki as the Prime Minister, President Barzani said.

¶6. (C) Senator Salazar also questioned the possibility of national reconciliation among the Sunni, Shia, and Kurds. President Barzani replied that the Kurds are struggling for democracy but as long as the Sunni and Shia Islamic extremists are in power, national reconciliation is not possible and moderate democratic forces cannot come in. Barzani called the recent four-party agreement an example of moderates coming together.

¶7. (C) As a follow-on question, Senator Salazar asked if the U.S. withdraws militarily, would that make reconciliation a lost cause. The President restated the impossibility of national reconciliation in the presence of Islamic extremists in the ministries and in the political decision making process. He said it is better for the U.S. to focus on bringing in and supporting groups of moderates into the GOI, such as the new alliance of four parties; this would also send the right message to neighboring countries.

#### BORDER SECURITY AND U.S. TROOP LEVELS

¶8. (C) Senator Nelson then raised the issue of border security to the President as an area of concern. He asked about the proposal before Congress to rely on a residual force of 50,000 troops to deal with Al Qaeda and local militias along with implementing counterterrorist measures. President Barzani replied that he did not disagree with the 50,000 level and that 130,000 was too high. Many missions can be handled by the Iraqi forces, and the USG should not be a police force patrolling the streets of Iraq, he added. He thought the Iraqi forces should take control of the cities, and the U.S. forces - their location and size - could be negotiated. The President did stress, however, the need for a U.S. military presence irrespective of the level to promote regional development and guard against interference from

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neighboring countries, in particular Iran.

¶9. (C) Senator Baucus asked if reducing the U.S. troops in Iraq would send a message to the GOI to take control of their affairs. Barzani replied that, yes, the Iraqis would "get their house in order" when they realized the U.S. would pull out its troops.

#### RECOGNITION OF THE KRG IN THE WAR ON TERROR

¶10. (SBU) In closing, President Barzani made a point of expressing his disappointment that not once during the recent testimony by General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker was the Kurdistan Region mentioned, particularly the cooperation the Kurds extended to the U.S. in fighting insurgents and terrorism. He stressed that the Kurds are part of Iraq and deserve to be recognized by the U.S.

¶11. (C) COMMENT: Due to scheduling and technical matters, the meeting was cut short. President Barzani was candid on his views of the possibilities of reconciliation and the importance of a USG presence not its size but gave little indication of the way forward in terms of the Kurds contribution to national unity. END COMMENT.

¶12. (U) CODEL BAUCUS did not have the opportunity to clear this cable before their departure.  
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